Mr. Ben Bradlee
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

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Dear Ben,

This past Wednesday, after reading what clearly was exclusively in our local papers, because by traditional news concepts this was important I phoned your foreign desk. I explained my reason for calling and was referred to John Goshko. First I read him what I quote below and then I gave him the background included in this story:

"Mr. (Ambassador) Melton, on Friday (the 8th), the day the delegation arrived, told the group before they entered bullet-proof American-made vans that would take them to Managua's largest hotel that 'the people here are amazingly friendly, when you figure we're here to overthrow their government.'"

Mr. Goshko had no questions, really made no comment until I asked him if he'd like me to mail the paper to him. Instead of saying he didn't want it, which was then apparent and soon became quite obvious, he said merely,"we're aware."

Do you know of any other official United States statement that our purpose and intent in Nicaragua is "to overthrow their government?"

Is suppression of this kind of information - in a society that can function properly only if well and accurately informed - your concept of good journalism or consistent with the great tradition so often boasted about?

Nicaragua expelled Ambassador Melton who then and later before the Senate intelligence committee professed ignorance of the reason and denied there was any reason, and this was not news?

Our State Department, lousy with sources for you and Goshko, took to TV to denounce Nicaragua's action as outrageous and this still was not news - to you (pl)?

Then we announced that we were expelling their ambassador, by force, if necessary, and this still was not news?

Not even, after those Iran/Contra hearings in particular, the executive branch was knowingly deceiving the Congress and the people? (I knew from past experience that official perjury is not news to the Post, so I don't go into that.)

So, your foreign desk and Goshko both knew that our ambassador had stated to four Members of Congress, carefully selected by the White House, their staffs, at least one "official" of the State Department and the lone reporter who had been permitted to accompany the delegation, that it is our policy to overthrow a government we recognize and that doing this was his purpose in being there, and this was not news?

There is more, some certain some reasonable conjecture from these two pages in the local papers, more that in my reporting day would have been regarded as news by honest papers intending decent and fair reporting.

This whole thing was keyed to what apparently the Post would like, renewed aid to the Contras to bleed that long-suffering country even more and this is clear in the story. Whether the White House, which arranged the whole thing, intended no reporters to be present I do not know but only the local papers were permitted. This could have been done by Mrs. Byron on her own but in any event, the policy of these papers is well known and they support all such official violence. The managing editor, Mike Powell, former big-city newsman, sent himself. He took only a photographer. I don't know that Helton did or did not know that anyone from the press was present but I'm inclined to think he didn't and that this had been the plan.

"This latest trip (Mrs. Byron's sixth) was not part of her work on the House Armed Services committee," the papers report, "but was, instead, a special delegation backed by the White House, Mr. Dohovan said. Funding for part of the trip came from the National Forum Foundation." And just before this, "Mike Donovan, a State Department official who accompanied the group on the Nicaragua trip, said: 'Mrs. Byron has experience that the co-sponsors (parent in original, (of the resolution)) don't have. She's been here before."

Her own account of one of those earlier trips is reported, "On the plane ride to Nicaragua she told stories of past trips, including one to Honduras where she went into the country and walked with Contra troops along jungle trails and across the border into northern Nicaragua."

Then and now it apparently was more important to propagandize for this Reagan policy that to worry about whether a woman Member of Congress might tread on a mine or be hurt in some other way, perhaps killed.

This junket they did segregate the two women Members and only the men and staffs, including embassy, went to Nandaime, where violence was expectable. But how nice it would have been for the Reagan/Post policy if an American had been injured, not so?

This White House delegation sent to support the resolution before the Congress, with no journalistic interest in whether tax money was used for any part of it, like an airplane, had time for virtually nothing else except a few of the stock people trooped out. They left on Friday and were back on Sunday.

These delegations in whom we are to place such credence, as indicated often enough by the Post and some in Congress and, of course, the White House, which contrives it all, what about them? This, of course, is not news:

"One political officer (at the embassy) said they take turns handling the 'dignitaries,' who usually come on weekends. Jan Hartman, a press attache who arrived only two months ago from assignment in Somalia, said: 'I've been here two months

and all the itineraries are the same. They visit the cardinal, visit opposition businessmen, visit La Prensa.'"

How necessary are those bullet-proof vans paid for with tax dollars when there is not enough money to feed the large percentage of children who live in poverty, take a few of the homeless off the streets, educate those who haven't the money? Mrs. Byron followed her at-home practise on the streets of Nicaragua, early-morning jogging. I'm sure you'll agree this didn't require a bullet-proof van.

More on how our tax money is spent - there are about 50 codels a year, so many they have this code word for Congressional delegations, all of whom see and talk to the same people - all partisans, all on one side.

This is not to suggest that Mrs. Byron didn't learn anything at all. She is quite clear in telling us that the paving has deteriorated.

Everyone was well aware that this delegation would be photographed and the pictures given prominence there. They were told by the embassy and they nonetheless not only went by gave every appearance of participating in the demonstration, including by gestures.

So, with the lusty collaboration of another of these codel weekend warriors the Reagan administration, with the support of the Post, has contrived still another propaganda strategem for getting more of our money spent bleeding other people even more in a war that cannot be won except by the participation of American armed forces.

When I was young I learned from Alice in Wonderland that up is down and I learned a little more about governments and the press from George Orwell. Now at 75 I am learning from the Post you edit that the glorious freedom of the press we have is so that major papers can become an arm of errant government.

Your Post is the most influential single voice in our national capital and it is what is read by most of the Congres and the government. And you give them propaganda and suppress fact even when the issue is critical, as this one has become, even when there is international damage to us, the people who once were so concerned about the concerns of mankind.

As so many editors learned too late in Hitler's day, if you play with fire you get burned. Sooner or later.

If this is your concept of the responsibilities of the American press, or Mrs. Graham's, you are entitled to your belief. Ditto if you think this is how free, democratic society, representstive society, works and preserves itself.

In retrospect I think I'd have done our country, our system, our concept of freedom, decency, morality and ethics, more good - nay, perhaps some good - if Instead I'd phoned the Nicaraguan embassy.

How proud you could have been if Tunnerman appeared before the press and waved

this story around and said he didn't see it in the Washington Post but in a jerkwater rag published in a rural community.

I'm not proud because I still believe in what I believed when I began reporting and writing in the 1920s.

If you are proud of this demonstration of the journalism of the great newspaper ypu edit I'd like to hear it.

Or if you think Goshko and others were even honest.

Or, of course, if you want to say that none of this was newsworthy, ~~but~~ or still defend printing without indication of the existence of anything else, what was clearly untruthfulness by the administration. If not mendacity and abuse of the country.

Sincerely,

Harold

Harold Weisberg